

51 Oxford Street
Hartford,CT 06105

February 17, 2022

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on the State Department of Education Budget

Good evening; my name is Leslie Toro, and my family and I reside in Hartford. My daughter attends the remarkable CREC Ana Grace Academy of the Arts magnet school in Bloomfield. I am here to ask you to provide increased funding to the CREC magnet school grant so more children can continue to experience a once-in-a-lifetime education, like my family has had the fortune of having.

When my husband and I applied to the lottery in 2014, we hoped to get into Ana Grace because the arts and were ecstatic when we did. Unfortunately, my husband died in 2015 in my daughter's first year as a PK3 student. We were grieving intensely and learning how to navigate this new world without my daughter's wonderful father. Little did I know that my daughter was getting to know her second family at school - the Ana Grace community is just that, a second family. They took us in with loving arms, and I will forever be grateful.

I had no idea that our magnet school would enrich my daughter's life in so many ways. I go to work every day confident that my daughter is learning, safe, and loved. My daughter shares heartwarming adventures, everyday whether it's learning the new Hairspray musical dance with Mrs. Wisniewski or meeting with Ms. Chause in the change makers group where the students are learning to collaborate, problem-solve, and have empathy for others. She also loves being part of the Dreeta book club with Mr. Banks, where she's learning about Refugees and their struggles. CREC's Ana Grace School has provided our family with opportunities and lessons that I alone couldn't achieve. We are so thankful for our Magnet school. We ask that you please consider increasing our state funding so that our magnet schools can continue operating and providing this once-in-a-lifetime experience for families like mine. Thank you for your time.

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